1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7

cipate yearly in the great initiation festival for boys and girls. Consequently as they repeat each year the lessons of their own initiation, the ceremonies are the main vehicle of Yao culture.[1]

There are also two Moslem ceremonies:

(1) *Jandu*, the boys' Moslem baptism, which takes about seven days, and is usually worked in with *lupanda*:

(2) *Nsondo*, the girls' Moslem baptism, which is the same as *jandu*, but usually quite separate from *ciputu*. It is important that the wife of a Moslem should have her *nsondo* so that she knows how to prepare the food properly at Ramadan.

Menstrual and Other Taboos

Menstruation is held to be dangerous. A special mat is used by the woman during this time, and is rolled up and kept during the rest of the cycle. The hut is completely replastered after menstruation. Intercourse during menses leads to disease of the man. Sexual contact is dangerous to persons at certain other periods: during initiation ceremonies, during mourning, and for babies who have not been through the protective rite. The danger is thought to lie in *sdaka*, a dread disease characterized by swelling. This may be transmitted by salt in the food. Deaths are often attributed to 'salt'. Much of the significance of the mourning is that medicines are prepared which protect the mourners against the dangers attendant on sexual activity.

Burial Rites

News of a death must be sent to the chief by a messenger carrying a single fowl. The chief gives a present of calico for wrapping the body, and a goat for the burial men. These are called *anilo*, neighbours unrelated to the dead, who volunteer for certain duties. They prepare the body for burial and carry it in procession to the graveyard outside the village. No uninitiated person is allowed to see the funeral. All who attend the burial are prohibited from sexual intercourse for one month. After this time the prohibition is lifted by a ceremony of beer drinking and feasting, and on the following day all fires in the village are extinguished, and then relit, and the mourners are shaved. A year later beer is brewed for a final ceremony.

For a period after her husband's death a widow is unclean, and has to be purified by ritual intercourse with a man who is paid. The widow is not allowed to remarry for two or three years. A widower leaves his wife's village, after receiving a parting gift. The widows of ordinary persons are not inherited. If a man has himself a 'name' (rank and social position), he has an heir, who inherits also the wives of his predecessor. But if the heir (the maternal nephew) has married a cross-cousin (mother's brother's daughter) he would not consider the wife's mother as his inherited wife.

Before the burial the dead man's hut used to be destroyed, together with his possessions. Immediately afterwards a consultation is held as to whether retaliatory action against sorcerers is called for. The *anilo*'s duties include not only the conducting of the burial, but also the subsequent inquiry and the conduct of the second ceremony, the beer drinking, at which they shave the mourners. A man who has

[1] Main sources for girls' initiation: Heckel, 1933, p. 19; Swanson, 1, 1910, pp. 184–7; 4, 1911, pp. 269–74; Stannus and Dovey, 1913; Duff, 1903, pp. 312–13; Abdullah, 1919, pp. 16–17; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 123–30; Werner, 1906, pp. 126–7; Johnston, 1897, p. 410.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

Further enquiries may reveal that this is only a section of a larger village, possibly a hundred or more yards away.

The boundaries of a village may not always be clear. Clusters of huts which are part of one village may be physically nearer another, but in the minds of the Yao, who see not only the huts but also the social relationships of the people occupying them, there is no confusion at all. As a general rule the villages are fairly compact and clearly demarcated from others, and even strangers have no difficulty in recognizing the autonomy of the group which is expressed in many different ways. MacDonald recorded that formerly a headman performed a certain amount of ritual which symbolized the unity of the village.[1] Much of this has fallen away, but the unity remains.

The ritual surrounding the foundation of a new village bears testimony to its persisting political significance. In this ritual the unity of the group, against other similar groups, including the village from which it has sprung, is expressed. On first arrival at a new village site the men build grass sheds, beginning with that of the headman. That night the headman pours a cone of sacred flour at the root of a tree on the site, and asks the spirits of his ancestors whether the site is propitious. Early next morning he examines the cone to see the answer. If a side of the cone has collapsed it does not augur well and another site is selected. If the cone is still whole it is taken that the spirits acquiesce, and permanent huts can be started. The headman then goes into the bush to find medicines[2] which he mixes with groundbeans. That night, with the medicated groundbeans in the hut, the headman has intercourse with his wife. In the morning those who are not sexually active come to the headman's grass shed to drink some water in which the medicine has been steeped and eat some of the medicated beans with a little porridge, which the headman's wife has prepared from the sacred flour. This medicine is called 'the medicine to strengthen the village' (*mtera wakulimbika musi*). Until then all members of the village should have been continent but after this sexual relationships may be resumed. The object of the medicine is to prevent those

[1] See pp. 31-2.

[2] *Nkudzapata* and *nkuta*, two plants commonly used for protection against *ndoka*. See I.n., p. 112.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

who are sexually inactive from contracting *ndaka*.[1] At the same time the headman gives each household a piece of the fire which has been newly kindled in the traditional way by rubbing two sticks together.

The mystical danger inherent in the act of setting up a new village is well brought out in the propitiatory prayer and the abstinence from sexual intercourse. Once again it is the village headman who must make the offering to his ancestors; and it is the village headman who has intercourse with his wife so that the effluvium from his sexual activity may permeate the medicine in the hut and so protect the villagers from *ndaka*. Lastly, it is very important that the whole village cooks and is warmed by one fire. 'We are of one fire' expresses the common origin of two villages; though in fact every time a new village is founded a new fire should be kindled. To bring fire from the village of origin is to bring sorcery, since the Yao believe that sorcery can operate between persons closely linked by kinship only. To have one's own fire is to be autonomous from other groups.

The Burdens and Rewards of Headmanship

MacDonald had the perspicuity to see not only that the village headman was the representative of a corporate group and that he represented this group to outsiders, but also that he represented external authority to his villagers. The village headman who in his person stood for the unity of the group, performed certain ritual acts which emphasized this, such as praying to the village ancestors. In spite of the decline of the ritual his position is still regarded as exceptional. Much, however, depends on the rank of the village headman. There may not be much difference in ritual observances and mystical dangers between a headman who has in his charge a meagre three or four huts, and a commoner. In the larger and more important

[1] This is one of the most important mystical concepts of the Yao. I have described this condition and its implications more fully in *Marriage among the Machinga Yao of Southern Nyasaland* (R.-L.I. Paper), forthcoming. Briefly it is a disease characterized by œdema which affects those who are sexually inactive when they are suddenly brought into contact with a person, or an object which he has touched, after having intercourse. The people most affected are the young and the old, i.e. those who cannot have sexual intercourse. Those who are capable of intercourse are expected to have ritual intercourse with a stranger, and so fortify themselves against this dread disease.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

disease *ndoka*.[1] This disease, as we have seen, affects the sexually inactive when they are brought into contact with those who are sexually active. But the disease will only affect the members of the matrilineage of the errant person. For example, suppose a labour migrant is coming home from Southern Rhodesia and has, among other things, a few pounds of salt in his baggage for a gift to his relatives. Suppose also that while he is returning he has promiscuous intercourse. The salt becomes charged with sexual heat and if he gives it to any of his matrilineal relatives to cook with, they will contract this disease. He must therefore give the salt to members of another matrilineage, even if they live in the same village.

It is when the unity of the matrilineage is threatened, by either death or division, that its mystical value appears most clearly. When a member of the matrilineage dies the whole matrilineage is thrown into mourning and remains continent for three days. On the fourth day they perform a ritual purification and some members resume sexual relations, but the closest matrilineal relatives, such as the mother and uterine siblings, remain continent for the remainder of the mourning period, which is about 36 days.

It is tension within the lineage which is most closely attended by dire results. The most important reflex of this tension is accusations of sorcery. Good relationships among members of a matrilineage are adjured, mainly because friction opens the way to sorcerers. The Yao believe that sorcerers kill their matrilineal relatives so that they may share the flesh with other sorcerers. The sorcerer is fundamentally a wicked person and may kill any relative but is more likely to kill those whom he hates. Hence it is most important that relationships are kept amicable within a matrilineage for fear that sorcery ensues.

An interesting variation of the dangers of sorcery is the belief that sorcerers take the opportunity of squabbles within a matrilineage to kill one of the members. The rationale behind this is that the diviner's instruments are unable to detect the origin of the sorcery beyond the immediate cause. A diviner will indicate that the cause of death of, say, a child is sorcery, but that the witch is obscured behind the quarrelling words of some relative. Consequently, danger to a matrilineage ensues when one of its

[1] See Chap. V, p. 112.

The m'michile then gets off on the left side, his assistant on the right and they stand in the shallow depressions. The m'michile starts asking riddles; he says, "*Ndewi* (riddle)!" and is answered by his assistant "*Jiicha* (let it come)!" Here is one: 881 533 539

"*Kangwe, lapile pasi!*"
"The little mouse it has defecated, it has gone into the ground!"
Answer: "*Michipi!* (roots)!"

He then goes round the crowd for the answer—if they cannot guess, they say, "*Ali ngawe,*" "it is yourself (to answer)." There are hundreds of such riddles.

The m'michile points to the tusks depicted in the *chinjago* and tells the people, "Long ago this used to be an elephant; look at the tusks." The hump at its back he tells them is the same as *ching'wedang'wede* which they will find farther along.

They pass next to mbunda, the zebra; a pair, male and female, is always figured.

"*Ajiji ngati mbunda ja mbuja Achilemala! Yoopa pakuti!*"
"This one is it not the zebra of Mister Mlemala! everything (is) beautiful!"

Sometimes a story is told to show that the zebra used to go to the sea to drink but seeing the whale, he ran away and came to the country of the python.

Then to nete, the python; he sings:

"*Anzeto kunjenji! pawe, eje! Yoopa pakuti!*"
"You python come and answer! all (is) beautiful!"

At the crocodile, nguena, he sings:

"*Chinguena ulemba, pawe! eje! akupasa munpalapala mesi!*"
"Mr Crocodile cleverness, he sleeps at the side of the water!"

At mwesi, the moon:

"*Anwesi ulemba, pawe! eje, awasi!*"
"You moon cleverness, !"

Next, they come to wakalile ukewa, the people drunk with beer. Two men lie on the ground, feet to feet with nothing on; the pudenda are covered with bark-cloth and the whole of their bodies painted with earth and flour to look like two female figures in earth. The song is:

"*Wakalile ukewa: kunisle awesi, wakalile ukewa!*"
"Drunk with beer: come and see the women, drunk with beer!"

A moral is pointed: the disgrace to a woman who gets drunk, lies on the ground, and exposes her person. As the m'michile makes these remarks, the figures breathe stertorously as a drunken woman would. He conducts the walk and all the other people past many of the other images such as *chiwi*, nguku, ndemunda, mbala, etc., and only stays at those he considers his own special images. The seven specially dealt with by Mlemala were as above together with mbalapi, the mbila antelope: [834 689]

3:Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

Peas, *nsuwa* (*Pisum sativum*), are grown in abundance. There are two other varieties; *ndese* (groundnuts), and *chindowiru*. 244 262

Sweet potatoes: *mbatata* (*Ipomoea batas*), of which the natives are very fond; they distinguish a red and a white variety, *mbatata nyanjiju* and *mbatata nyasiwuru*.

The tuber-like root of a bush called *nyumbu* is also eaten, likewise the young underground shoots of a palm tree. The leaves of the sweet potato and the leaves of many wild growing plants are collected by the women and cooked like spinach; the flowers of pumpkins are used in a similar way. Of fruits eaten, the banana, *kipombo*, takes first place. A very large number of species of *Musaceae* are grown, including *makumbuka*, *mbinga*, *sukali*, *nanini wanyuye*, *kabutu* a dwarf banana, *kisipwa* a wild banana, and *mlonga*, the plantain. The paw-paw is found all over the district. There are several varieties of pumpkin, *lyungu*, including *mkonda*, *chindendoli*, and a very large species called *mtuv wa nguwa*, "the crocodile's head." Varieties of cucumbers include *lingaka* and *kahitungulu*. 262 222

A large number of wild fruits are eaten, among them figs, *hukuju* (*Ficus*), *kisuku* (*Uapaca*), *chitili* and *livanga*, the fruits of two species of *Landolphia*, *matonga* or Kaffir oranges (a species of *Strychnos*), *chikundu*, the fruits of *Hyphaene* (palms), *makwakwa* (*Myrianthus*) a wild tree belonging to the mulberry family, and others, *ndawa*, *makangandembo*, *ndondwaka*, *chingulungulu*, *chindopolyu*, *malemba*, *likwenda*, etc. The seeds from the heads of bulrushes (*Typha*) are mashed up and eaten.

All fish are eaten except the *nyanga*, which always causes urticaria. 262

The flesh of all the antelopes, of oxen, sheep and goats is eaten greedily; only bushbuck is avoided by some people as it is said to cause a skin eruption. Elephant is shunned by many on account of its rough skin, also rhinoceros because of the ulcers which it often has on its body, and hippopotamus on account of the marks on its back which are thought to be akin to leprosy. People eating the flesh of these animals are supposed often to sicken with leprosy, the pachydermatous skin, the ulceration or anaesthetic depigmented patches of that disease being reproduced, as the case may be. Few will eat pig or warthog on account of the digging habits of these animals. It is thought they may sometimes grub up bodies from graves. These flesh taboos may be due to Mohammedan influence. The lion, hyaena, and fox no one would touch, as they are supposed to be connected with *usewi*,[1] but the heart of the lion might be eaten to acquire courage. Few will touch leopard flesh, but Kasungu's descendants do so. All will eat of the flesh of the serval cat but very few of the common wild cat. The rock rabbit, *nyangwiru* (*sibiru*, Chin.), is refused by most Yao as it is a "beast without shame," having no tail to hide what should in decency be hid. Very few will partake of the baboon, but monkey is acceptable to many. A few reject porcupine, supposing they will break out in spots, while the zebra may cause stripes, and none will touch the skunk. No one eats *nunje*, a mouse that is believed to die if it crosses a path. All kinds of rats are eaten, but the shrew-rat and cane-rat only by boys. Snakes 753 262 [77] 834

[1] Vide supra, p. 334.

6: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7

844 believe that she will die. The man's representatives are therefore able to establish the child's paternity from the birth-pang confessions of the woman.

846 The child is kept in the hut where it was born, for six or seven days, while the umbilical cord dries and falls off. During this time (*kuli*) the child is unnamed, and [553] it is named only when it is taken out of the hut. Should it die during this period of seclusion it remains unnamed and is referred to by a special term (*lituya*, pl. *matuya*). [128] I have therefore been able to enumerate live births by means of the distinction made between miscarriages and still-births (*kwesanga*) and children who lived long enough to be referred to as *matuya*. After the birth of the child the woman may not have 846 intercourse for four or five months. To do so would be to endanger the life of the [854] child with a disease called *ndaka*,[1] which is contracted by a sexually inactive person 834 when he comes into contact with a sexually active person. The husband may have intercourse with a second wife, but must take care to medicate himself so that he does not endanger the life of his child. When the child is about 4 or 5 months of age the parents perform ritual intercourse and medicate the child against the mystical dangers of sexual activity; sexual relations are then resumed.

834 The Yao say that a second child should not be born while the first is still being [853] suckled. Since lactation continues for about two years I am uncertain whether monogynists remain continent, as they say they do, or whether *coitus interruptus* is 464 practised. It is quite usual for husbands to become labour migrants when their 842 children are still very young. I have known women to write to their husbands who are away working and tell them to return because their children have 'grown', i.e. have been weaned. Labour recruiters had difficulty in recruiting men immediately after the soldiers had been demobilized at the end of the war, because the women objected, saying that they had remained childless long enough and the men must first wait until children were born. However, actual examination of birth-dates [163] shows that children are sometimes born within a year of one another and sometimes there are quite big gaps. The two-year gap between children is probably an ideal which few attain.

3. The Estimation of Fertility

(a) *Sundbaerg's Age Divisions*

128 As a preliminary estimate of fertility, Sundbaerg's trichotomy of ages may be considered. The argument behind this division of the population into Youth, Middle Age, and Old Age is that those populations with a high proportion of youth have a greater tendency to increase. Table V shows this trichotomy for the Yao with the same material for some other populations shown for comparison. Where the gross reproduction-rate is known for the period shown in the table, this is included.

128 At any one time a certain proportion of the population is absent from the area, 162 usually at some labour centre. Hence the proportions of the population are distributed abnormally. In all there appeared to be a total of sixty-three men, women, and children absent from the hamlets, who would otherwise have been living there. Hence in Table V these have been included in the totals in the 'Yao with absentees' proportions.

[171] [1] A disease of this sort is believed in by many Central African tribes. Among the Nyanja-speaking peoples it is known as *tsunguka*.